

Of Course She Knew by darthstormer

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Summary: After a few months cooped up in the cabin, Hopper and Eleven are at their wits end. It's time for an unexpected ally to step in and give them a helping hand.

Of Course She Knew

It was an bright morning in early April, the kind of day that let you know Spring had come at last to Hawkins. The sun was shining, the birds were chirping, the flowers were beginning to bloom, and Chief Jim Hopper was in a bad mood. He paid little attention to the road as he drove to the station, his thoughts preoccupied with the angry girl he had just left back at the cabin. For two days now, he and Eleven had been butting heads at almost every turn. She would still join him at the table for breakfast and dinner but wouldn't say a word through the whole meal, simply glaring at him in frustration. As he left this morning, she had proceeded to pull the front door open behind him after he had already walked out, just so she could slam it again for emphasis. The second it was closed once more, she slammed every lock in unison with as much force as she could muster. The combined bang of the locks had been so loud, Hopper was worried for just a moment that he had stumbled over the tripwire alarm strung across the path leading to their front porch.

As much as he wanted to place the blame for the fight squarely on her young shoulders, Hopper knew he played a part in the whole ordeal as well. When he had first found her in the woods, half frozen and surviving on squirrels, she had eagerly accepted his offer of the old cabin as a home. It had meant warmth, food, a bed and most importantly, someone who genuinely cared for her. Now, a few months later, the snows had melted and she had begun to view the cabin as more prison than home, and Hopper as warden. He could understand where she was coming from, of course. Day after day she sat there, cut off from the world, while Hopper got to still go out and live his life. Night after night, she sent her mind out into the darkness to find the boy she loved and watched his heart break a little more as he begged for the slightest sign that she was still out there; that she was alive and okay. Hopper had explained to her the importance of keeping silent; that letting him know she was out there could put both of them, and Mike as well, in serious danger.

Each day Hopper drove home with the fear that he would find the front door unlocked and the cabin empty and she would be gone. He would be forced to sit by and wonder if she was coming back or

running from him for good. Would she be seen? Would the bad men, as she called them, find her and drag her back into the prison of her former life? So far, angry though she might be when he got home, she was still there.

What Hopper needed was advise from a parent. It had been years since he had played Dad, and even then, his Sara had been eight when that chapter of his life closed. He really didn't have the first clue how to connect with a teenage girl; especially one with a past as unique as Eleven's. He had thought on more than one occasion of reaching out to Joyce Byers, but he knew the risk was just too great. She had her own struggles dealing with Will and the flashbacks he was tormented by. She was also regularly taking him for treatment at the lab, walking right into the heart of the place he was trying to save Eleven from. No, he was going to have to figure this out on his own.

As he pulled his Blazer into the space reserved for him in front of the station, his head began to ache with an all too familiar throb. He grabbed his coat from the passenger seat and headed inside.

"Morning Flo," he grumbled as he passed his dedicated secretary and dispatcher.

"Good morning to you too, Hop," she replied, noting the exhaustion dragging down his face.

Hanging his coat on a hook, he poured a mug of coffee and headed to his office, hoping to lose himself in the overnight reports that would surely be sitting there. Settling into his chair, he reached for the aspirin bottle that had recently become an integral part of his morning routine. Popping off the top, he attempted to shake a pair of pills into his hand, before remembering he had emptied the last two the previous day. Picking up the phone, Hopper readied himself for a lecture on taking better care of himself as he dialed Flo's extension.

"Hey Flo, do you have any aspirin up there?" he asked when she picked up.

"Of course I have aspirin. Just a minute," she answered, setting the phone back down before he could thank her.

Moments later she appeared in his doorway with the bottle in one hand and a glass of water in the other. Handing both over she said, "You can't take those with coffee. You'll burn an even bigger hole in your stomach than you already have."

"Thanks Flo," he said, appreciative there was at least one person in his life looking out for him, even if that meant the loss of an occasional morning donut.

Turning to leave, she had second thoughts and pushed the door shut instead. If he wasn't going to talk about it, she was going to drag it out of him.

Looking back at the Chief and catching the curious expression on his face, she began, "So is it trouble with the girl?"

Hopper stared back at the woman as she sat down in one of the chairs by his desk, his face a mask of shocked disbelief, rapidly draining of all color. "What does she know and how could she possibly have found out?" his mind was screaming.

"Oh calm down," she chastised. "I don't know who she is or why you're hiding her; I'm sure you have a good reason. I haven't spent the last thirty years in this office without learning a few detective skills. The signs have been there if anyone cared to notice, which nobody ever seems to do around here. After the whole Will Byers incident last fall, you seemed to fall into a pretty deep funk as the rest of the town was rejoicing that he was home. That was, until Grayson showed up telling everyone who would listen about the girl in the woods who attacked him with a flaming log while he was hunting and stole his coat and hat. Suddenly you were a man with a purpose, digging into every report of anything remotely strange going on out in the woods. That's also about the time the Wheeler boy started showing up looking for you every few weeks. I think December was the last time you ever answered the phone out at your house; every call's gone to your machine since then. Whenever someone brings up the stories of that Russian spy girl, you get all nervous and change the subject just as fast as you can."

She paused, taking in the expression on Hopper's face. She could tell she was on the right track. Hopper was fighting back the panic as he

realized how cleanly all the separate pieces of his life had been pieced together. Flo was exceptionally observant and had always been able to read him like a book. Still, if she had figured it out, could someone else put those same pieces together?

"Of course," she continued, "the biggest clue was back in January when I got a call from my friend Janet at the Goodwill over in Jefferson. She was curious why our Chief of Police was over there buying a full wardrobe for a young teen girl, from outfits and pajamas right on down to underwear and socks." She laughed then before teasing him just a little, "Really Hop, if your going on some secret shopping trip, you need to leave the Hawkins Police Blazer here and go somewhere further than the next county over."

Worried now about this loose end, he asked "So what did you tell her?"

"I told her we had a family who had a minor house fire and their daughter's room had suffered the worst of the damage. To help out, the department was picking her up some basics to get going again until insurance came through and her parents could replace her things properly."

Hopper couldn't help but smile at her quick thinking in diffusing the potentially disastrous questions.

She went on, "So, to summarize. I don't know where you are keeping her or why, but you have a young teenage girl hidden away somewhere. I'm pretty sure you are living there with her, protecting her from whatever dangerous people are trying to find her. I'm guessing in an effort to keep her safe, you are her only contact with the outside world. And after several months of that, she is getting frustrated and you are realizing you are in over your head with no idea how to deal with a teenage girl."

"So how'd I do?" she asked, settling back in her chair.

All Hopper could do was stare back at the face of the woman who had so thoroughly unwound his careful deception. His brain swirled with dozens of thoughts about how to proceed. He could deny everything, which she would see right through. Or he could tell her

everything and drag her into the group of those in potentially mortal danger. Still, he knew she was capable of being completely discrete when necessary, particularly in this case if there was a young girl involved.

Finally, deciding that she had figured out enough that she deserved the truth, he nodded. "You've pretty well got it all. I can't tell you who she is or where I'm keeping her, but yes. I have been watching over her since just after Christmas and there are some very dangerous people looking for her. I've been trying to take every precaution so people don't know she is with me, though I clearly need to step up my game a bit on that. She's a twelve year old girl who is getting sick and tired of staring at my face across the dinner table every night. She understands the dangers, but she is also getting restless. And, of course, there's a boy. She's desperate to see him again, to let him know she's alright."

"Mike Wheeler?" she asked, already fairly certain of the answer.

"Yeah. Officially she died in a terrible accident last fall, but Wheeler has never bought that story. That's why he shows up every few weeks, looking for any news about her. He heard about Grayson's attack in the woods and put it together, same as I did. I think the kid spent every weekend scouring those woods all winter, looking for any trace of her. It kills me to have to look into those sad, pleading eyes and lie to his face that I haven't heard anything new. More than once I've been tempted to drag him out of here, throw him in the Blazer and drive him to her. But it's just too risky; I'm pretty sure the same people looking for her are watching him too."

"Wow. She must be a pretty special girl for you to go through all this, rather than turning it over to FBI, witness protection, something," she complimented.

"Yeah, she's an amazing girl with a pretty heartbreaking past."

"Okay, well I can't help you much with the hiding or protecting, but I think I can help you out with the teenage-girl part of the equation," she offered. "Don't forget, I raised two girls of my own, and they turned out alright."

"So what do I do?" he asked, rather suddenly. "How do I convince her she has to stay hidden, cut off from the world, without making her feel like a prisoner?"

"Step one," she began, "you've got to be honest with her. Do you have any idea how long she is going to have to be hidden?"

He shook his head, "No idea."

"So you have to tell her that. Explain what has to happen for her to be able to go out again. You have to be careful about using open-ended notions like 'soon' and 'maybe'. She's going to need real answers, and it sounds like she can probably deal with that, she just needs to know what she is facing."

Hopper nodded once more. He had regularly been feeding her the 'soon' line and failing to deliver on any of the things she was hoping for.

"Second, you've got to do anything you can to give her some change of scenery, whenever you can swing it. I'm guessing wherever you have her, she doesn't get out and about in the fresh air much?"

She watched his face fall, ashamed.

"At all?" she asked.

He shook his head at that, "Not really. It's not safe."

"Jesus, Hopper, no wonder you're having trouble. Alright, here's what you're going to do. First, you are going home as soon as we are done talking." She fished in her pocket and pulled out the keys to her car. "You're taking my car and leaving the Blazer; I'll get a ride home from Powell. You're going to swing by the store and get her a present. It doesn't have to be anything big or fancy, just something you know she would like, to let her know you are thinking about her. When you get home, wherever that is, after she's gotten her gift, throw a couple changes of cloths in a bag for each of you and the pair of you are going to get in the car and take off. She'll probably be safest under a blanket in the backseat until you are away from town a good ways, but I'm sure she'll go for it with the novelty of getting to actually go

somewhere. Use the drive to talk and clear the air. Remember, you have to be honest with her. Head up to Chicago or over to Cincinnati. Get a motel room for a couple nights. Take her to a mall, go see a movie, take her out for pizza; let her just be a kid for a couple days."

Hopper knew there would be no arguing the point with Flo, and he had to admit, the plan sounded good. At this point, he was willing to try anything. He drove first to the next town over, hoping to avoid some recognition from nosy salespeople, and stopped at the Hallmark store. Selecting what he hoped was a proper peace offering, he paid for his purchase and made the drive back to the cabin, planning out just where he would take her. He parked and made the short trek to cabin, carefully stepping over the alarm wire as he approached.

He gave the secret knock and waited what felt like an eternity, before repeating it. Finally, she unlocked the door, surprised to find him home hours before he would normally arrive. She suspiciously eyed the bag he was carrying as he walked over to the couch and sat down, motioning her for to join him.

"I want to say I'm sorry," he began. "I know it hasn't been easy staying cooped up in the cabin all the time with only the TV to keep you company. I want to try and find some ways to make things a little better. First, I got you a little something."

He passed the bag over to her and she looked cautiously inside, still wary of gifts and the secret agendas that may lurk behind. She couldn't help but smile as she pulled the soft brown stuffed bear out.

"Thank you," she said, softening a little as she looked back at Hopper, unconsciously hugging the bear tightly to her chest as she did so.

"There's more. I want you to pick out some pajamas and two outfits. We're going to get out of here for a couple days."

At that, her eyes went wide with delight. She didn't know where they were going, but if it meant something other than four walls and the TV, she knew it would be good.

Two days later, as they were driving back from Cincinnati, Hopper couldn't help but smile as he looked over and saw Eleven fast asleep

in the passenger seat. Clutched tightly to her chest was the stuffed bear. Flo had been completely correct, this trip had been just the medicine they had needed to work through months of pent up frustration. For the first time in quite a while, Hopper thought they just might make it through all this. He was certain there would still be slip-ups, he would make promises he couldn't keep, but he had hope. And he had a strong ally in Flo to help them get through.